

8 function on the characteristic values of the users of the plurality of users
9 related to the particular user.

1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the electronic community is a community
2 for the buying and selling of merchandise over a network.

1 3. The method of claim 2 wherein the network comprises the internet.

1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the characteristic value is based on
2 feedback received from other users of the plurality of users in the
3 electronic community.

1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the feedback is received from other users
6 who have bought or sold goods or services with the particular user.

1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the set of relationships includes
2 sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the
3 plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

1 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the relationships of the plurality of users
2 can be represented as one or more n-ary trees.

1 8. The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the relationships
2 between the plurality of users is stored in data structures for each user of
3 the plurality of users.

- 1 9. The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user
2 contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was
3 sponsored by the particular user.
- 1 10. The method of claim 1, wherein a recursive routine is used in determining
2 a community rating for the particular user.
- 1 11. The method of claim 10, wherein the community rating and the
2 characteristic values are numerical.
- 1 12. (Once Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the community rating is
2 an aggregate of the characteristic value for each user of the plurality of
3 users that is a lineal descendant of the particular user and the
4 characteristic value of the particular user.
- 1 13. (Once Amended) A method comprising:
2 maintaining reputation value on each user of a plurality of users
3 within an electronic trading community through which goods and services
4 are bought and sold, the reputation value being derived for a particular
5 user of the plurality of users from feedback received concerning the
6 particular user from other users of the plurality of users;
7 maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users, the
8 set of relationships including sponsorship relationships between the
9 particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored
10 by the particular user, where the set of relationships for a particular user
11 can be represented as an n-ary tree;

12 deriving a community rating for the particular user by aggregating
13 the reputation value for each user of the plurality of users that is related to
14 the particular user through a linear sponsorship succession as can be
15 represented by the n-ary tree in which the particular user is the root of the
16 n-ary tree.

- 1 14. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for
2 performing a method in a computer system for determining a community
3 rating for a particular user of a plurality of users within an electronic
4 community comprising:
5 maintaining a characteristic value for each user of the plurality of
6 users;
7 maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users;
8 and
9 deriving a community rating for the particular user by performing a
10 function on the characteristic values of the users of the plurality of users
11 related to the particular user.

1 15. The computer-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the electronic
2 community is a community for the buying and selling of merchandise using
3 an electronic forum.

1 16. The computer-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the characteristic
2 value is based on feedback received from other users of the plurality of
3 users in the electronic community.

- 1 17. The computer-readable medium of claim 16, wherein the set of
2 relationships includes sponsorship relationships.
- 1 18. (Once Amended) The computer-readable medium of claim 17, wherein the
2 community rating and the characteristic values are numerical, and the
3 community rating is an aggregate of the characteristic value for each user
4 of the plurality of users that is a lineal descendant of the particular user
5 and the characteristic value of the particular user derived using a recursive
6 routine.
- 1 19. A computer system for determining a community rating for a particular
2 user of a plurality of users within an electronic community comprising:
3 a storage device having stored therein information and data relating
4 to one or more sets of relationships between a plurality of users of an
5 electronic community, one or more characteristic values for each user of
6 the plurality of users, and one or more routines for determining one or
7 more community ratings based on the characteristic values of each user of
8 the plurality of users and the relationships between the plurality of users;
9 and
10 a processor coupled to the storage device for executing the one or
11 more routines to derive the one or more community ratings.
- 1 20. The computer system of claim 19 further comprising a network interface
2 connected with a communications network over which data and
3 information related to and including the one or more characteristic values

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and one or more community values for each user of the plurality may be transmitted.